



DENCA Advisory Council Minutes

November 2, 2011

Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Grand Junction, CO

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction and
- Terry Kimber, of Delta

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Ben Blom and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Lee Gelatt, Sherry Schenk, Jan Shepherd, Eric Rechel, Jan Potterveld, Joyce Olson, Terry Gray, Kay Simmonson, Dick Miller, Tom Deryberry, Steve Chapel, Conrad and Mary Tucker, Joyce Olson, Tanna Gray, Mark Ackerman.

Katie Steele determined that there was a quorum and opened the meeting. She said that the Council's plans for the day included discussing a set of draft management proposals developed by BLM staff (part of the resource management plan and environmental impact statement), then sought public comments.

Public comment

Jan Potterveld said he'd had a great experience on trail monitoring training with Colorado Canyon Association's Rosa Brey. **Eric Rechel** noted the addition to the D-E NCA website of information and maps about the distribution of big game in the NCE. He then asked if similar information could be added about bats and lizards (BLM staff clarified that data collection is ongoing and BLM doesn't have the same level of specific habitat information for these groups of species yet). Jan **Shepherd** asked whether a formal public comment period was planned on the alternatives.

Alternatives

Stevens said the D-E NCA planning process is getting to the meat of where the Advisory Council can be of most help. Planning laws and regulations require the BLM to develop a range of management alternatives or scenarios of how the resource might be managed into the future. Those alternatives are then evaluated and analyzed as to how they would impact the environment (environmental impact analysis). BLM planning staff have prepared four different potential management plans (known in the

planning process as Alternatives) for review by the Advisory Council . These management alternatives are based on the following:

- Scoping comments from the public
- Comments from the Advisory Council
- The Omnibus Act language and
- Federal laws and regulations governing public lands, livestock grazing, archeology and more.

At this point, these alternatives are at the “advanced brainstorming” stage, and their primary function is to trigger input from the Advisory Council and Cooperating Agencies. They are anticipated to change based on that input. Feedback on the draft alternatives will also coming from local governments, the tribes, BLM field offices, the BLM’s State Office in Denver, and eventually ,from the Washington office. Details in the alternatives will change through those various reviews.

The question still before the Council is: *Do the alternatives encompass the full range of options that should be considered?* The Preferred Alternative, which indicates the Alternative considered by the BLM to best resolve the various planning issues, has not yet been developed. It will be developed based early in 2012, through review and discussion of the other potential management options, and may draw on pieces and parts from the other potential management plans.

Opportunities for public comment will be provided next fall, when the public will have a chance to review the full range of resource management alternatives developed by the BLM with the Advisory Council’s and Cooperating Agencies’ recommendations. Until then, the public will continue to have a chance to provide input to the Advisory Council regarding what they’d like to see in the Alternatives.

Overview of alternatives

Blom gave an overview of the broad themes of the four potential draft management plans, and then took a look at more specific management measures for geology and paleontology to give the Council experience with how the Alternative might be formatted and organized. (The Advisory Council will receive more information about alternatives and how the alternatives would impact D-E NCA purposes and uses in the weeks ahead.)

Commonalities

The NCA will be managed across all alternatives for consistency with the NCA’s guiding legislation, the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. The Act stresses conservation and protection of the “unique and important resources and values of the land” as the purpose of the NCA’s designation. These resources and values are geological, cultural, archaeological, paleontological, natural, scientific, recreational, wilderness, wildlife, riparian, historical, educational, and scenic, as well as the NCA’s water resources. To meet the intention of the Act, these resources are to be conserved and protected across all alternatives. Tradeoffs between resources occur across the alternatives (for example, managing more intensively for biological resources in one alternative and for recreation in another). However, significant degradation or exclusion of any of the NCA’s purposes was not considered reasonable given the Act’s founding legislation.

All resource management plans contain an alternative titled “No Action.” This alternative is based on continuation of current management under existing guidance, and provides an environmental baseline

by allowing the impacts of current management to be considered for comparison. In the case of the NCA, this current management scenario is based on guidance contained in the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (1987) and amendments; the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan (1989) and amendments; the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009; and BLM's Interim Management Policy for Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness (2010).

The other potential management approaches developed to date include:

- An alternative based on reliance on natural processes. Under this management approach, the BLM would allow natural processes to take their course in the NCA, and would rely more heavily on restrictions on allowable uses, as opposed to active management (e.g., treatments and projects). For recreation, management of NCA would stress on-site interpretation/education and heritage tourism.
- An alternative based on active management for biological restoration, with ambitious goals for improving the health of biological resources. This alternative would focus less on education/interpretation as a means of managing for and protecting cultural resources,
- An alternative based on active management for biological resources, while also developing a higher number of trail-based recreation opportunities and managing for a quality recreation experience.

Discussion

Discussions with Council members explored the comparisons and contrasts between alternatives. **Steve Acquafresca** asked about wildfires as an example, and the Council explored the idea that under a Natural Processes management approach, there might be less of an emphasis on active fire suppression, while under the Active management approach, the option of reseeding after a fire might allow for different suppression strategies.

The management approach of developing trail-based recreation may require more intensive, outcome-based, Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) style management, but would also allow the BLM to more proactively manage recreation, anticipating and responding to increasing visitation before unacceptable effects are noted on the ground

The Council and BLM staff discussed the ramifications of applying different alternatives to:

- Resource Management
- Wilderness Management
- Recreation, Science and Education
- Livestock Grazing and
- Special Designations, such as Wild & Scenic River and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Terry Kimber: Reminded the Council that his understanding of “Conservation” is that you keep what is there in place.

Doug Atchley: Delta County will be interested in reviewing alternatives to see how they differ in regard to maintaining current grazing opportunities—Delta County’s support for the NCA was and is tied to the interpretation that NCAs allow grazing to continue as it was at the time of designation. Private property rights for private landowners within the NCA is also an important theme for Delta County.

Katie Stevens explained that the land health assessment and permit renewal process is the level of planning where specific changes in grazing programs are more often made (as opposed to the RMP process we're in now); you would expect to see major changes in grazing authorizations at the land use planning (RMP) level in situations where desired conditions cannot be achieved under any level of grazing.

Geology and Paleontology

Based on a suggestion from **Tamera Minnick** that the Council start off by looking at a straightforward section, **Ben Blom** reviewed the potential range of alternatives for geology and paleontology to give the Council experience in examining ways in which management can vary across different alternatives.

For these two programs, many of the elements regarding how BLM would manage would be similar across alternatives, with the following exceptions:

- Self-guided vs. on-site interpretation: there could be some potential variations in how many resources BLM would put into on-site interpretation (facilities, kiosks, signs).
- How much encouragement would be provided for research. **Minnick** noted that areas will be more attractive for scientific research if there are no extra costs (in timing or funding) associated with permitting requirements.

Public discussion also focused on the differences between commercial and private-use flagstone quarrying; search and rescue operations in wilderness and the desire for motorized recreationists to be left alone

End of meeting

A field trip for five members of the Council is planned for November 19 in Cactus Park. Council can expect to receive more material about alternatives and ramifications for D-E NCA purposes and uses in the weeks ahead. The next meeting of the Council will be December 7 in Delta.